

Feature: International Higher Education

Living with the Other: higher education in the global era

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The question is no longer how to get rid of strangers and the strange once and for all, or declare human variety but a momentary inconvenience, but how to live with alterity – daily and permanently.

Zygmunt Bauman 1997, p. 30

To understand 'globalisation' simply as the world market is to adopt the neo-liberal doctrine that all human identities and relationships should be understood in the terms of a capitalist economy. It is to rule out any other kind of world, any other markers of identity, any other kind of international relationship. This suggests that a broader and less pejorative definition of 'globalisation' is needed, so as to open us to the fuller range of relationships made possible by electronic networking, travel-based encounters and cultural hybridity.

An alternative approach is to define the 'global' in geo-spatial terms rather than in terms of particular economic values. In geo-spatial terms, the term 'global' should be distinguished from 'international'. 'International' refers to relations between nations (inter-national). 'Global' refers to systems and relationships that are practised beyond the local and national dimension, at continental, meta-nation regional and world levels. These global relationships are technological, cultural and political as well as economic; and are expressed in flows of ideas, images and people, as well as flows of money and goods (Appadurai 1996; Held et al. 1999). In this sense 'globalisation' simply means 'becoming global'.

'Global' relationships as such are not new. Universities in the European-Anglo-American tradition have long been part of larger global networks, for example in the academic disciplines. Now, however, the 'global' dimension has unprecedented presence in daily academic life. Universities are part of world markets in international education and intellectual property. Global technologies enable instant data transfer, and have structured a much larger set of international collaborations. Cross-border staff and student movement is expanding. International trade agreements have the potential to reset national education policy and provision. In Australia the 'global' dimension of higher education is now omnipresent (except for those who work

hard to remain disengaged). E-mails, flights, agreements, cross-national teams, international students and colleagues: all are burgeoning.

Some experiences of 'globalisation' are more profound than others. Most internet communication is in English. The largest part of the travelling is to America and Britain, and Western Europe, and some travelling to East Asia remains effectively confined to sealed-off English language environments. In this context international work is a bit too easy, especially for Anglo-Euro-Australians. On the other hand, more transformative encounters also take place, in which our own identities are open to change. 'Globalisation' starts to take in cultural diversity. We begin to see the world through the eyes of others.

If there is a danger for Australian higher education in the global environment, it does not lie in the malleability of identity. Global encounters do not in themselves undermine the capacity to sustain identity, unless that identity is fragile from the start. In fact the global environment offers richer resources with which to make and remake the identity of Australian higher education; enabling us to transcend the old oscillation between Britain and the USA. In conjunction with the multi-culturalism of Australia itself, 'globalisation' provides new opportunities to bring a distinctive Australian contribution to the world.

The danger rather is *global convergence*: that the contents of the media and systems of 'globalisation', including the models of higher education we employ and the systems of international bench-marking that we follow, will push everyone, in every country, into common patterns of higher education, in which an (idealised) American university model becomes the only possible model. To take one example, if every other country reinvents itself in terms of American norms such as mixed public and private funding and provision, but without the extraordinary public and private resources which Americans bring to bear on higher education, most countries will be doomed to be weak imitators of the 'one possible' global model - rather than being strong producers of their own local-national models, and possible alternative global models (Marginson and Considine 2000)

The articles

Marjorie Griffin Cohen's article on 'The general agreement on trade in services' (GATS) and its potential impact on public higher education maps the emerging system of global trade in services. It demonstrates the capacity of an unmodified GATS to deconstruct national higher education systems in the medium term. In the manner of the Hilmer (1993) reading of national competition policy in Australia, the GATS imposes an unambiguously commercial framework on a sector which has been shaped historically by considerations of public policy. Not only is the national interest completely subordinated to the trading rights of cross-border corporations, democratic politics is completely subordinated to economics.

In the global era, we are seeing a complex transformation of the role of the national state *vis à vis* the global economy and governance. The national state continues to be the main site in which politics is played out, economic regulation is signed off, and place-based identity is shaped. Which sectors are regulated globally, and which sectors are regulated nationally or locally, is an issue now in the melting pot. There is now little debate about the desirability of the global regulation of finance, and as Griffin Cohen notes, the economic liberalisation of information technology and telecommunications – systems at the heart of contemporary 'globalisation' – has also proceeded without much debate. Education, and particularly public higher education, is a rather different matter.

National higher education systems have antecedents in older traditions of the university, and developed in the twentieth century as creatures of the modern state, rather than as a branch of the commercial economy. It is clear that the internationally tradable aspects of higher education will be regulated globally. The question is whether a commercial logic should be worked back through the core national systems. To turn universities into a branch of the commercial economy is to change their role and character and to subtract from the nation state one of its chief mechanisms of nation-building. Except from the viewpoint of would be cross-border private providers, there is no reason why higher education should not continue to be regulated nationally and subject to policy considerations over and above the logic of market competition. Arguably, the continued national regulation of higher education is necessary; not only because of its formative role in national identity, but to the maintenance of diversity within higher education itself.

In "Corporations 'R' Us? The impacts of globalisation on Australian Universities", Graham Pratt and David Poole remind us that the national policy and funding framework remains relevant in the global era and also that globalisation is having an immense impact on government policies at individual universities. They draw attention to the tensions and contradictions resulting from the sudden expansion of fee-based courses. The culture of Australian universities is clearly in transformation as entrepreneurialism spreads, yet the income generated by international

students is less widely distributed. For some fields of study, the experience has been largely financially negative so far.

The relationship between university, government, economy, national/ local cultures, and civic society, is capable of many permutations. Australia developed a successful system of higher education on largely British lines but without the aggressive British structuring of social class and with less of the old British-European stand-off between conservatives and moderns. In this respect Australian education has had much in common with American education, but the role of government has always been central to Australian education, to a non-American extent: correspondingly there is much less private wealth and civic support than in the USA. The American settlement in higher education diverges from Australian history and conditions of possibility in significant ways. This suggests that we will need to look beyond the ever-visible American institutions, in fashioning a distinctive trajectory for Australian higher education in the global environment.

At the same time, because the American case is similar to the Australian case in some ways; and because the USA is now so important as a global model, developments in the USA inevitably influence us. Thus analytical data about the real US higher education system (rather than idealised images of it) are strategically significant for Australians. Brian Pusser's article 'The Role of the State in the Provision of Higher Education in the United States' opens up for scrutiny the emerging for-profit sector in the United States, the implications of 'non-preferred' commercial activities in non-profit public and private institutions, and the changing patterns of government support.

Contrary to popular wisdom in Australia, the state is the most important player in American higher education, as in nearly every country in the world. The role of the state in American higher education is split between Federal and State-level government, with the latter playing a much larger part than in Australia, and there is a complex regulatory apparatus incorporating many external interests, and politicised regional accreditation bodies. Pusser focuses on what might be the beginning of a major change in the role of the state and the public goods functions of higher education. For-profit education is still small, but if an entrepreneurial model becomes strong this would have immense implications not only for American education but for world higher education. A wealthy commercial American sector would be formidable both in on-site and on-line higher education. It would secure a lot of business. It would entrench a powerful global model.

The impact of the business model of university is felt not only via the for-profit institutions themselves, but within the erstwhile non profit sector: the public universities and community colleges and the private non profit institutions. American higher education exhibits the familiar combination of declining state support for non-profit education, coupled with growing entrepreneurial activity within non-profit higher education. The first trend helps to drive the second trend. But rarely do the commercial activities of

institutions generate substantial subsidies that benefit the public good side of the equation. Though it generates increasing revenues and absorbs significant managerial energy, commercial activity such as goods franchising does not substitute for public funding. It is difficult to justify such activity, either in terms of private or public goods.

Pusser traces a shift in the politics of funding and provision, from non profit education to for-profit education. His article complements the recent report of the QUT-based research on 'borderless education' and the commercial sector (Cunningham et al. 2000). The American for-profit sector already receives indirect public support via Pell grants and loans to students. The ideological climate and the emerging equity market in post-school education both tend to normalise the commercial model, despite the fact the only a small fraction of students are enrolled in actual for-profit ('proprietary') institutions. Equally significantly, Pusser notes that there is no clear stated policy rationale for the public funding of public goods in education, and for the continuance of the public sector provision which still houses more than 75 per cent of American higher education students

The leaders of the for-profit institutions, such as the University of Phoenix with over 80,000 students, and DeVry, are effective lobbyists. They are now asking governments for direct grants, using the familiar argument that this will 'level the playing field' between for-profits and non profits. It is a Hilmer (1993) style claim which presupposes that higher education is *already* a commercial market, and blocks out public goods rationales for public provision and funding, such as the formation of human personality in a democratic framework of opportunity, and the reproduction and development of a common store of knowledge and culture. The elision is not logical, nor is it fair: it is a distortion that is only possible in a neo-liberal dominated policy climate.

Pusser suggests that if present trends continue, the non-profit universities, especially those in the public sector, might lose their way. They cannot operate with the lean and mean efficiency of the for-profit University of Phoenix, which confines itself to low cost vocational courses and does without a library, paid academic faculty or research activity. At the same time, the commercial activities of some of the public sector universities have so affected their internal cultures and priorities that in many respects they exhibit the behaviours of for-profit institutions. Non-profit universities such as New York and Cornell run for-profit subsidiaries which like Apollo, the parent company of the University of Phoenix, are potential magnets for the surplus capital in American equity markets. Pusser suggests that a new kind of institution, a 'hybrid' for-profit non-profit university, is emerging. It is an argument that is readily applied in Australia.

The situation facing higher education in Russia is very different. Like Pusser, in 'Tuition policy issues in Russian higher education' Olga Bain uses political economy as her framework of analysis and the policy contours are imme-

diately recognisable to us. The story is the breakdown of tuition-free higher education amid the collapse of the state sector and a partial and tortured deregulation. It is clear that in Russia, as in Australia, state-provided free education was popular; and also clear that the popular consensus on public education did not extend to the political elite. The Trojan horse was the late-era Soviet reform that tied universities closer to employers, contract training. It established fee-paying via proxy persons (enterprises and organisations), allowing a fee-sector to develop without directly violating the Constitutional provision on, free education.

Since then institutions have been permitted to charge fees to over-quota students, a fee-charging private sector has developed, there are differential fees for high demand areas such as business studies and law, and voucher proposals are under debate. As in the US, the contribution of the public goods produced in higher education is downplayed, and the rationale for state subsidies is ill-defined. The trend to marketisation has done nothing to correct the impoverishment of a once highly developed national system, though it has strengthened universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg – where the best graduate jobs are generated - at the expense of the rest of the higher education system.

Although the global analytical framework provided by political economy gives us easy access to the financial politics of Russian higher education, it has a serious downside: the anthropological flavour of Russian higher education vanishes. Life in the universities under the Soviet regime, the well-springs of the phenomenal scientific achievement of the past and what is happening to science now, and the cultural character of the institutions in the post-Soviet environment: all remain obscure. We cannot glimpse what is lost in the impoverishment that Bain records, and in the transition to a market based in immediate economic utilities not cultural values.

In contrast, in 'The Americanisation of university reforms or the rejection of the university tradition?' Marcela Mollis' uses an historical and cultural analysis and thereby opens up the particular features of the Argentine universities; and through them, the Latin American university tradition. Rather than the 'other' being sanitised for us by political economy, cultural analysis allows us to engage with and learn from its 'otherness'. In terms of political economy and global geo-politics, Argentina has much in common with certain other nations, for example Australia and Canada, that are also located on the cultural-economic periphery of the United States. At the same time, Argentina's state, cultural and educational institutions also exhibit distinctive non-Anglo-American features.

Argentina is undergoing the same combination of state austerity and policy-induced marketisation that is apparent in the USA, Russia and Australia. At the same time, the politics of reform in Argentina is shaped also by the 'Reformist tradition' first established in the modernisation reforms of 1918 and after: a tradition which profoundly affected not only other Latin American countries but

France as well. Mollis notes that the Reform of 1918 was premised on the university as the formative agency of a professional elite steeped in national and universal culture, in a mode that was meritocratic and democratic. The universities were public institutions autonomous of the state: their role as state critic became firmly defined, despite brutal interruptions by periodic military dictatorships.

The Reformed universities were governed by the three estates of academic faculty, students and graduates, and regulated by periodic examinations and competition. There was open entry to all qualified students and fees were low or non-existent. The Argentine universities give students more dignity than do any universities in the Anglo-American tradition. The premise on which the Reformist model were based, the preparation of social leaders in the form of lawyers and doctors and government officials, no longer hold: for example, the Reformist model pre-dates the rise of the science-based research university and the more recent growth of business education and computing. Nevertheless, there is more than one possible line of development from here. The World Bank and IMF intervene directly in government policies in Argentina, and Mollis describes how the Bank has targeted the distinctive national-cultural features of Argentine universities, their system of governance and their predominantly public sector and low fee character.

In doing away with its national model, Argentina would lose much of the best of its universities, and could lose all of their potential global contribution. Neither the World Bank nor a series of neo-liberal influenced governments – nor the universities themselves – have devised a reform that would build on those distinctive national strengths. As in Russia, it seems that it has become much easier to envisage the imposition of the pre-packaged 'one true' global model. As in Australia, governments and university leaders in what is a half-Americanised country find it too easy to go to Washington. Argentina and Australia are both the site of a long and unresolved struggle between dependence and self-determination, in education in other sectors.

The final piece in this group of articles, by Marginson and Mollis, is focused on how we compare different higher education systems, and about the impact of 'globalisation' on ways of thinking in the field of comparative international education. When national education institutions and systems are compared, the process of comparison involves both *sameness* and *difference*, which can be combined in variable ways. Sameness provides the common basis for comparison. Difference enables at least some of the particularities of each case to be recognised,

even while others are obscured by the common comparison.

In the field of international comparative education, which plays a growing role in national education policies – for example cross-national data on participation, education expenditure and student learning outcomes – the dominant element is sameness. The study of comparative education has been strongly influenced by international agencies such as OECD and the World Bank which use common global templates derived from European and (especially) American practices. Here international comparisons are instruments of a homogenising form of globalisation, encouraging convergence between hitherto distinctive national educational traditions, and tending to obscure local identity and 'deep difference'.

At the same time, orthodox comparative education still treats the nation-state as the sole analytical unit and has yet to develop analytical tools incorporating global effects: thus, argue Marginson and Mollis, an Americanising global mission is concealed within a pre-global methodology, and the global dimension appears as merely an appendage of American national identity. However, the old approach to comparative education is obsolete. A new geo-political-educational map is needed, encompassing the interwoven global, national, local and institutional factors, foregrounding global agencies such as the World Bank as objects of research, and respecting difference as well as sameness.

The article argues for educational comparisons that are grounded in the refusal of hegemonic claims, the explanation of difference, the primacy of theory over methodology, and sympathetic engagement with 'the Other'. If this collection of articles assists in the deeper engagement of Australian readers with 'other' higher education in the United States, Russia and Argentina, and ultimately elsewhere, then it has fulfilled its purpose.

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